**Triple planetary crisis**

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The United Nations was founded after the Second World War (1945) to maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations, and promote social progress, better living standards, and human rights.

It took 27 years to realize that peace and social progress in the world were impossible without considering the human environment. So, precisely 50 years ago, on June 5, the UN held its first world conference on the environment in Stockholm to make the environment a major issue – and that is why every year the 5th of June is celebrated as World Environment Day.

Today is exceptional not because it is just another World Environment Day or because it is the golden jubilee of the Stockholm Environment Conference. It is special because today is a stocktaking time to assess the outcome of the dialogue which was initiated fifty years ago between industrialized and developing countries on the link between economic growth, the pollution of this planet’s air, water, and oceans, and the well-being of people around the world.

Fifty years ago, mindful that there was a race between (economic) development and (environmental) catastrophe, the global community committed to promoting human wellbeing through sound environmental management.

Fifty years down the road, we find that “global wellbeing is at risk – and it’s largely because we haven’t kept our environmental promises”, as put by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres last Thursday. There have been some piecemeal efforts to protect the planet since 1972 to rescue the ozone layer. However, humanity uses up the world’s resources faster than they can naturally recover. Maintaining the way we live today requires 1.6 times the resources of planet earth, and nature is unable to keep up with these demands. This lifestyle is simply not sustainable, and it is creating havoc that is manifesting as climate change.

According to the UN, the planet is getting hotter, ice is melting, and oceans are rising and filling up with plastic. We’re losing species, building up greenhouse gases, and running out of time as climate-related disasters like floods and heatwaves disrupt lives and displace communities. Over 3.5 billion people are highly vulnerable to climate impact.

In its global risk report 2022, the World Economic Forum declares “climate action failure” as the number one long-term threat to the world and the risk with potentially the most severe impacts over the next decade.

The CO2 emission level leading to an increase in the earth’s temperature is a scorecard of collective performance. It needs to be halved by 2030 to avoid temperature rises of 2.7C and higher by the end of the century. But this massive transformation requires financial resources, technology, and political will. In other words, we need the collaboration, cooperation and collective efforts that the global community started to discuss in Stockholm fifty years ago.

Unfortunately, despite the increased awareness about climate change, the principles of “environmental justice” and “common but differentiated responsibilities” that bind the highest polluters (world’s largest economies) to pay for the environmental damages are constantly ignored during the last fifty years.

The cost of climate adaptation in developing nations estimated to be $100 billion a year in 2014 is now estimated to be $500 billion. Lack of cooperation from the developed world forces them to resort to measures that may increase their GDP (financial resources), but through measures that would turn their environment hotter, oceans polluted, and air unbreathable. This is again highly unsustainable.

But even if everything were hundred per cent sustainable, there would still be work to repair the damage. And how we should accelerate climate action, manage a shift away from fossil fuels and ensure the world doesn’t go hungry in a new challenging geopolitical and economic environment is a critical leadership challenge.

Today is a reminder that the world is not only lacking resources. It also lacks the leadership to envision and achieve a shared vision. Our climate actions today are neither holistic nor inclusive. According to the World Economic Forum, “The disorderly climate transition characterized by divergent trajectories worldwide and across sectors will further drive apart countries and bifurcate societies, creating barriers to cooperation.”

Pointing out these challenges during last week’s Stockholm+50 Conference held in Sweden, the UN called for bold choices to cope against a “triple planetary crisis” by unleashing a paradigm shift for the benefit of future generations.

The impact of a triple planetary crisis of climate disruption, biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste has been further aggravated due to the Covid-19 pandemic and conflict.

In Pakistan, we have already seen unprecedented temperatures this year. The drought in Balochistan and in many parts of Sindh, the glacial lakes outburst floods up north, heatwaves in March and April, the increasingly decreasing availability of groundwater, and the polluted air and oceans all remind us of the fact that climate inaction will further increase our vulnerabilities to this triple planetary crisis.

It is good to keep building moral pressure on the developed world to pay for the wounds that it has inflicted on Mother Earth through its unsustainable means of development. However, on the domestic front, without waiting for any external assistance, we have to ensure that the whole government wholeheartedly implements all of the policies (and we have no shortage of such policies) to tackle climate change. Today is a reminder that there is no second planet for humanity to live on, and there is no Plan B except to co-exist with nature.

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